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AGAM-P (M) (7 Mar 68) FOR OT RD-67X186

13 March 1968

AD 389011

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report - Battle of AN THACH, 2d Battalion,
35th Infantry, 3d Bde TF, 4th Infantry Division, Period of
20 August 1967 (U)

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KENNETH G. WICKHAM
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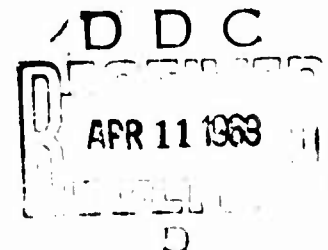
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AVDC-4-09

10 November 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

1. Name of Operation: Battle of An Thach.
2. Date of Operation: 201100 to 202000 August 1967.
3. Location: An Thach Hamlet, Duc Pho District, Quang Ngai Province, RVN.
4. Command and Control Headquarters:
 - a. 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - b. Reporting Officers:
 - (1) LTC Norman L. Tiller, Sr, CO, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.
 - (2) CPT Larry W. Hicks, CO, Co A, 2nd Bn, 35th Infantry.
 - (3) CPT James L. Lindsey, CO, Co B, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.
 - (4) CPT William E. Hocker, CO, Co C, 2d Bn, 34th Armor.
 - (5) 1LT Homer L. Krout, Platoon Leader, Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.
5. Task Organization:
 - a. Company A, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - b. Company B, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - c. Team Hocker: Company C, 2d Battalion, 34th Armor and Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.
6. Supporting Forces:
 - a. The Tactical Air Control Party attached to the brigade provided an airborne forward air controller (FAC) on immediate notice. The FAC played a vital role as an aerial observer, by informing the ground commanders of enemy movement and dispositions and by using marking rockets to indicate enemy locations.
 - b. Observation helicopters from 3d Brigade Aviation Section maintained close surveillance of the immediate contact area and advised ground elements of enemy movements.

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AVTC-0-0P

10 November 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

c. Gunships from the 174th Aviation Company covered possible routes of enemy withdrawal preventing the enemy from escaping.

7. Intelligence:

a. Weather: On 20 August 1967, from 1130 hours to 1630 hours the temperature varied from 92 degrees to 97 degrees F; visibility was seven to ten miles and the wind was five to ten knots from the south-southwest. Visibility was excellent with scattered cirrus clouds at 15,000 feet.

b. Terrain: The site of the battlefield was characterized by thick bamboo and cacti hedgerows forming irregular rectangles with flat open ground between them. Concealed behind these hedgerows the enemy had excellent fields of fire. The hedgerows afforded the enemy natural obstacles not easily penetrated by a dismounted soldier.

c. Enemy: A reinforced rifle company of approximately sixty men was the antagonist in this contact. They fought desperately, from bunkers and trenches, to hold on to their positions without success. The enemy was quickly encircled. Realizing his predicament he attempted to escape to the west, moving from trench to trench pausing only long enough to fire a few bursts and move again. Realizing that he was trapped, his resistance became fanatical and several enemy soldiers made suicidal charges at tanks with automatic weapons. The enemy chose to die rather than surrender. Others attempted to evade by taking refuge in family bunkers. They were discovered by friendly elements making a final search of the battlefield. They, too, refused to surrender and continued to resist until they were killed. The 2d Company, 97th Bn, 2d VC Regiment, 3d NVA Division was identified from captured documents. A captured personnel roster listed forty-one men present for duty, fourteen men were on other missions, sick leave, or R&R. This unit was equipped with twenty-seven weapons as indicated by a captured weapons roster. Eighteen of those weapons were captured, listed below in paragraph 11b.

d. Analysis: The 2d Company, 97th Bn, 2d VC Regiment assembled its forces in the village of An Thach presumably to accomplish one of two missions. One mission could have been to conduct an attack on a nearby P. F. outpost. Another possibility would have been to evacuate the unit by boat to Binh Dinh Province. The amount of ammunition collected from the bodies was sufficient for the enemy to mount and sustain a limited attack; however, their sixty-man company was an inadequate force to engage a U. S. Company or base camp. Nevertheless, a unit of this size could easily overrun a P. F. outpost. It can be safely assumed that the enemy intended to stay only long enough to assemble forces and formulate final plans.

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8. Mission: The mission of Team Hocker (C/2-34 Armor (-) and Recon Platoon 2-35) was to conduct a detailed search of the hamlet of An Tho, vicinity BS812454. Once contact with the enemy was made, by a heavy tank section investigating a "ground to air" fire report at BS800469, Captain Hocker altered the mission to close with the enemy. The missions of Company B and Company A were to block from the north and south respectively and to assist Team Hocker in the "mopping up" phase of the battle.

9. Concept of Operation: Evolving from the enemy's maneuvers and from the general nature of the terrain, the concept was that Team Hocker would push the enemy from the hamlet of An Thach (2), vicinity BS800464, to the west toward the open rice fields. Company B, operating 1500 meters north of An Thach, was to maneuver to the south, blocking enemy escape to the north; while Company A was air assaulted at BS805458, south of An Thach, to engage the enemy fleeing in that direction. Observation aircraft were to keep watch over the open areas to the west.

10. Execution:

a. At 1118 hours the battalion net control station received a report from the 174th Aviation Company that a helicopter delivering resupply to Team Hocker had received small arms fire from vicinity BS800460, about 500 meters northwest of Team Hocker's location. Captain Hocker sent a section of three tanks to the north, and at 1148 this section reported chasing two VC into a trench and killing one at BS812455. Almost immediately the tank section became heavily engaged from several enemy positions firing automatic and semi-automatic fire. (See sketch 1). Captain Hocker deployed the remainder of his team to the northwest and requested an observation aircraft. The Brigade FAC, Maj. Murray L. Smith already airborne over the AO, was above the area of contact within five minutes. He was able to observe the main enemy force and advised Captain Hocker accordingly. By 1210 hours all of Team Hocker had deployed on line moving to the northwest and had killed two additional VC. At 1222 hours two men from C/2-34 Armor (-) were wounded when their tank was hit by an explosive round of unknown type. The tank was not disabled and while they awaited aeromedical evacuation the team continued to pursue and to engage the enemy. At 1240 hours the battalion requested gunships to support the battle; they were on station five minutes later. Captain Hocker estimated the enemy force to be at least a platoon and reported that they were moving to the west. While Major Smith and gunship pilots kept watch over the western edge of the hamlet, the tank-infantry team routed and killed eight enemy in trenches vicinity BS796460. By 1315 hours, eleven enemy had been killed and two friendlies wounded. The enemy was not attempting a rapid withdrawal but was being moved out by the firepower and the close order tactics of the tanks and

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10 November 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

infantry. Enemy fire was still moderate to heavy and at 1318 hours LTC Tiller, the Battalion Commander, ordered Company B to move from their location north of the battle area southwest toward the scene of contact.

b. As B/2-35 moved to the southwest LTC Tiller directed them from the air. When they were within 150 meters of An Thach hamlet B Company deployed on line and began searching to the south. Team Hocker, still in contact, reported another enemy killed at 1358 hours. At 1400 hours the Battalion Commander alerted A Company to prepare to be picked up from their location and be air assaulted south of An Thach. Between 1400 and 1417 hours, Team Hocker pushed through the last heavy enemy resistance, killing fourteen enemy, many at pointblank range. (See sketch 2). As soon as Team Hocker reached the western edge of An Thach, Captain Hocker requested permission to reverse his course and move slowly back through the contact area. LTC Tiller granted permission and instructed the team to search the contact area for hidden VC and for weapons and equipment. When Team Hocker began the "mopping up" phase of the battle at 1420 hours a total of 26 enemy had been killed and nine weapons, including a 60mm mortar, had been captured.

c. As B Company swept on line to the southwest and Team Hocker searched on line back through the battlefield to the east, Company A was air assaulted south of An Thach, completing insertion at 1510 hours and began a systematic search to the north. (See sketch 3). Team Hocker reported enemy kills at five to ten minute intervals throughout the following hour, bringing their total kills to 39 by 1505 hours. At 1630 hours the Brigade S2 reported that Brigade Aviation aircraft supporting the battle had killed eight VC and captured three weapons. At 1800 hours Company A engaged and killed two enemy and captured two automatic weapons. Elements of A/2-35 and B/2-35 made contact with Team Hocker securing the pick up zone vicinity BS800462, while the remainder of Team Hocker continued the search. Company B moved northeast towards their night location along the beach. The extraction of A/2-35 began at 1843. At 1905 with two platoons of Co A extracted, the remaining platoon located a bunker with armed enemy inside. The last lift was delayed until 2005 hours. In the interim, 1A/2-35 killed five VC and captured their weapons. Following extraction of 1A/2-35 the tank platoon moved to Team Hocker's night location. (See sketch 4).

d. Contact with the enemy was moderate between 1100 and 1500 hours. Contact was light from 1500 until 2000 hours. Range of engagement varied from one meter to one hundred meters. Communications were good within the contact area and also between reporting stations.

11. Results:

a. Enemy personnel losses 53 KIA

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b. Enemy weapons seized:

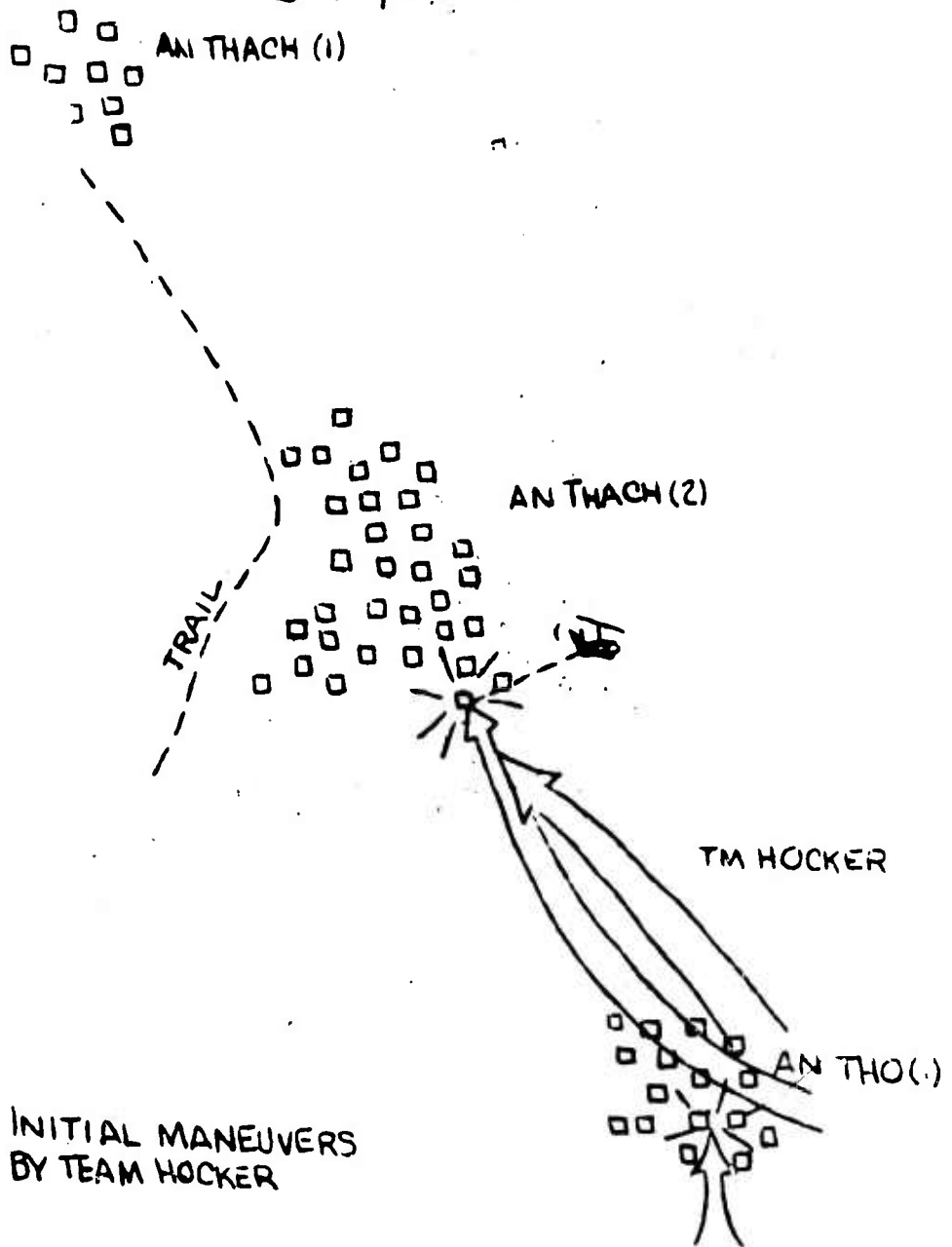
- (1) 60mm Mortar (complete) 1
- (2) M-79 1
- (3) SKS 9
- (4) Soviet Machinegun 1
- (5) BAR 1
- (6) AK-47 1
- (7) Chilcom SMG 1
- (8) M-16 1
- (9) M-1 Carbine 1
- (10) 45 cal automatic pistol 1

12. Commanders's Analysis:

This victory can be attributed directly to the cooperation and teamwork of all the units and individuals involved. It is a lasting example of several well trained units working toward a common goal. When the initial report of enemy ground to air fire came in it was immediately relayed to the nearest friendly unit which took immediate action. Captain Hocker's quick response coupled with the aggressive tactics and thorough search techniques of his team brought about this enemy defeat. This action points up the absolute necessity of having air observation over the target area. Major Smith, USAF, greatly influenced the course of action by assisting Captain Hocker in the maneuver of his elements directly into the enemy position. Major Smith continuously reported on the enemy maneuvers until the 3d Bde Aviation Section helicopters were able to arrive on the scene. This type of aerial observation paid off handsomely in the extremely high kill ratio of this contact, fifty-three enemy KIA to zero US KIA. Continuous aerial observation allowed Captain Hocker to maneuver his forces and defeat the enemy unit piecemeal. Captain Hocker repeatedly concentrated his forces in overwhelming strength at the enemy's location as reported by the aerial observers. This outstanding employment of tanks and infantry together, the firepower and maneuver of the tanks with the close in fighting of the infantry, resulted in the virtual annihilation of the 2d Company, 97th Battalion, 2d VC Regiment.

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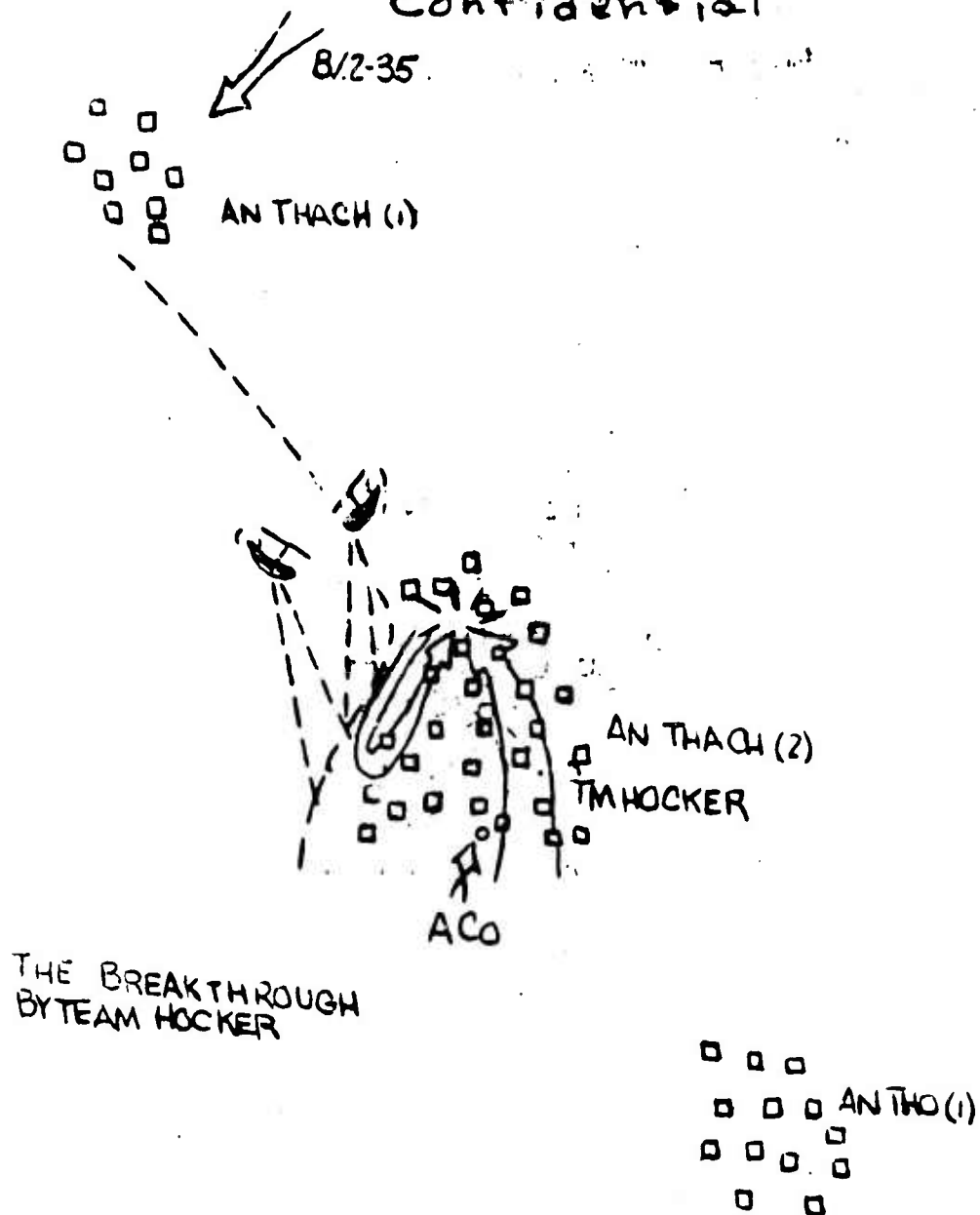
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SKETCH 1

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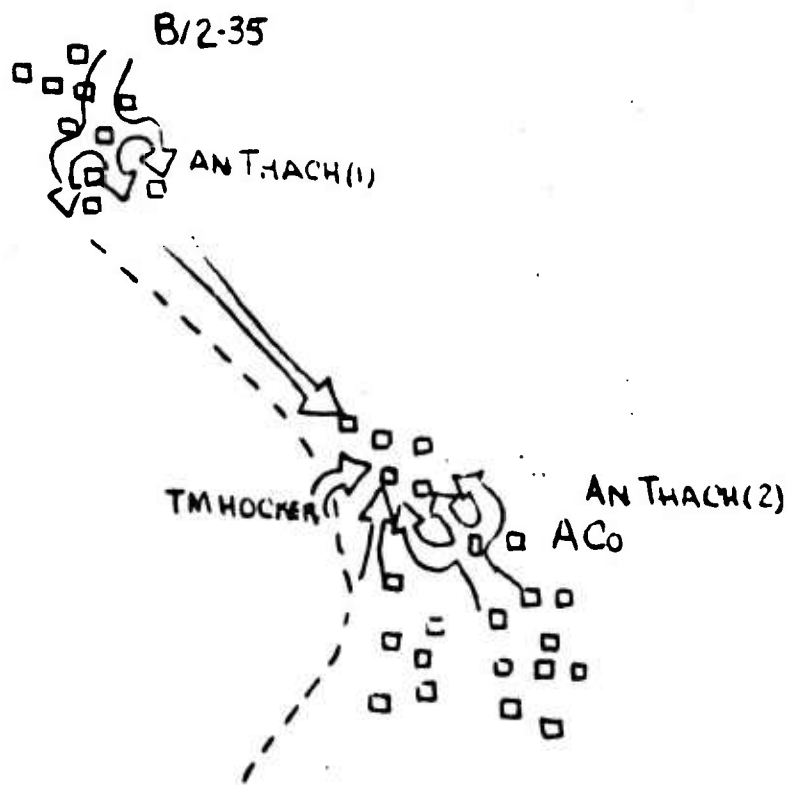


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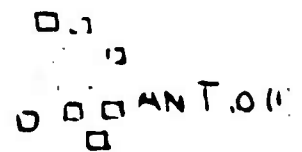
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THE MOPPING UP



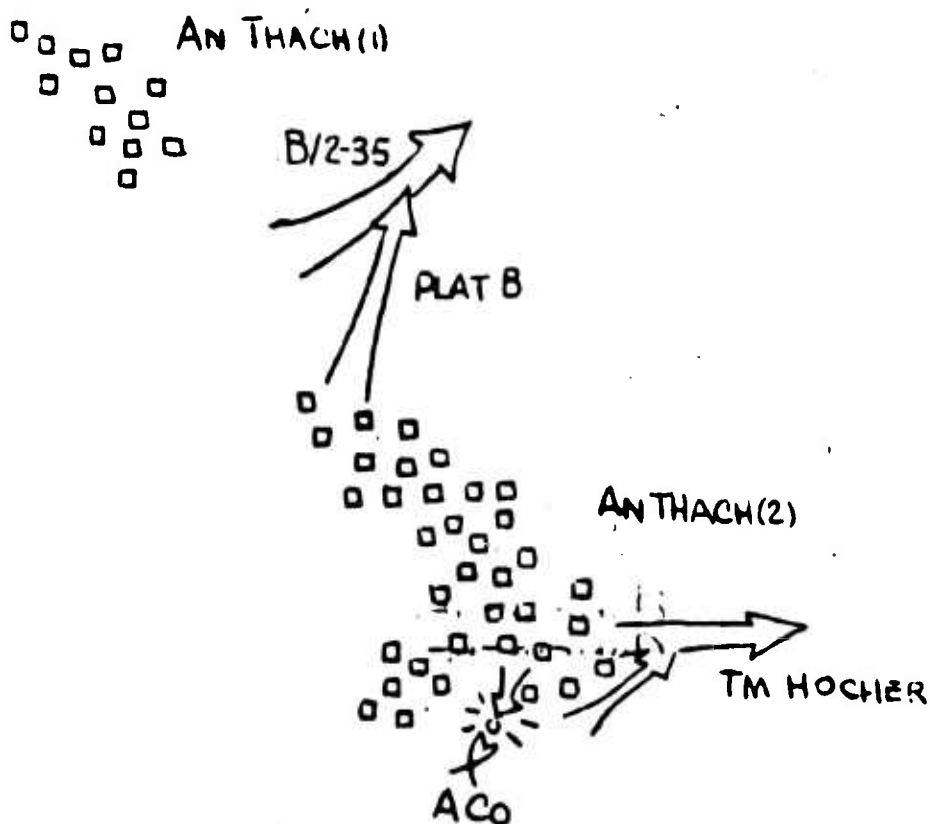
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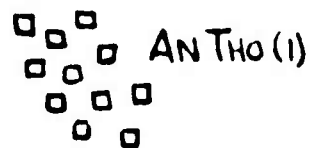
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UNITS MOVE TO
NIGHT LOCATIONS



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SKETCH 4

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